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e University of The daylong pro- lay, Feb. 27 offers de range of topics, architecture, and a the music of Weill

iday lecture will cial, economic and t that gave birth to ed by Fischer's per- music and songs

, has been widely e incarnation of nd the "boy wonder n chansons" by the dia. Making his ut, Fischer will pre- toire that includes prominent, but now ish composers and lyricists of the Berlin cabaret era: Friedrich Hollaender, Mischa Spoliansky, Kurt Tucholsky, Kurt Robitschek and Walter Mehring, among others.

These are not the torch songs most Americans associate with the term "cabaret."

Indeed, "the hallmark of cabaret in the 1920s is parody and satire," says Jelavich in a telephone interview from Texas. "Cabaret satirized the politics and sexual mores, the fads and fashions of the day."

At the height of Berlin cabaret, in the mid-to-late '20s, as many as 150 small venues offered a rich mix of songs, skits, monologues and even dance to a cross-section of progressive intellectuals and

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"The lucky ones got to England or America and a few of them wound up in Hollywood," Jelavich said. "But many were captured in Paris and Amsterdam. Some of them actually performed in concentration camps. Ultimately, however, most of them were killed."

The Nazis tried to replace authentic Berlin cabaret with a so-called "positive cabaret" in the mid-1930s. "However, it simply didn't work," Jelavich contended.

After World War II, cabaret was reborn in both parts of the newly partitioned Germany. But the post-war cabaret was much less about music and "more about talk," Jelavich said.

Today, a small but growing number of German singers and performers, like Tim Fischer, have resurrected the classic material of the 1920s cabaret era, making it possible for new audiences to discover and appreciate the achievements of a forgotten generation of Jewish and non-Jewish artists who lived and worked together in a Berlin before the Third Reich.

"Berlin in the Twenties: Metropolis on the Edge" is at 8 p.m. next Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 27 at the Herbst Theatre 401 Van Ness, S.F. Tickets: $50 for both days; $30 for just Friday and $25 for just Saturday. Information: (415) 392-4400.

B-92

San Francisco Chronicle

DATEBOOK

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1999

Tim Fischer's Torch Song Odyssey

By Neva Chonin
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Tim Fischer is many things: sultry, talented, willfully romantic and an avowed hedonist.

On Monday, his first day in San Francisco, he is also jet-lagged, tipsy and wearing a black feather jacket with satin pants and high-top Converse sneakers. A hairdresser – requested as soon as he stepped off his flight from Berlin – has smoothed his unruly curls.

Already popular in his native Germany with eight albums to his credit, Fischer is visiting the United States for the first time to perform Friday at Herbst Theatre as part of the Humanities West program "Berlin in the Twenties: Metropolis on the Edge." He's also slated for five nights next week at Josie's Cabaret, sponsored by the Goethe Institut.

Overall, Fischer, 25, is just about everything you'd want in a cross-dressing cabaret

▶ **FISCHER:** *Page E5 Col. 1*

JOHN O'HARA / *The Chronicle*

Caberet singer Tim Fischer wore a feathery jacket to talk about his performance style

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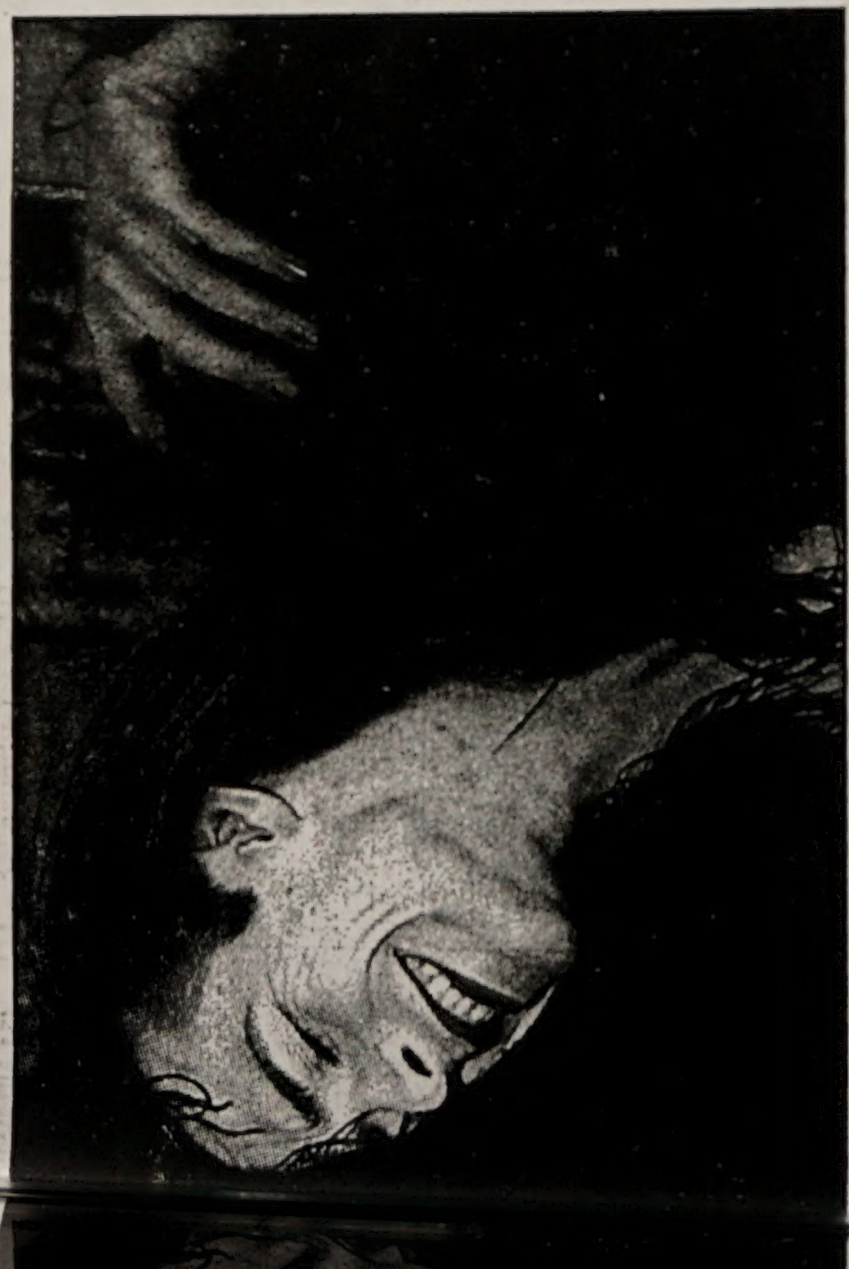

JOHN O'HARA / The Chronicle

...ican songs," says German singer Tim Fischer, who is making his U.S. debut.

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▶ **FISCHER:** *Page E5 Col. 1*

Fischer 'Between the Sexes'

▸ FISCHER
From Page E1

singer who can deliver "Moon River" as if it were an existential plaint from Audrey Hepburn's melancholy twin, Holly Go-Darkly.

"I am very nervous to be here in San Francisco," he says, daintily gulping a glass of Cabernet in a corner of the Mission's Casanova Lounge. "But I think I will make a very good concert.

"I was always in love with American songs. I thought America must be the most romantic nation in the world. Mae West – she was so wonderfully common."

Fischer, as he readily admits, is wonderfully uncommon. "There are many cabaret singers in Germany, but they copy old forms, which is totally different from what I do. I don't do travesty or parody music from one era. I do songs from all times."

For Fischer, the cabaret, or chanson, tradition isn't a dusty artifact of Weimar Germany and modernist Paris, though he loves those eras. It's a living musical art form that includes any song with the potential for grand passion or woe – the type of song Anna Karenina might have crooned while waiting for her train.

A Fischer performance can include a mischievous reading of "Is That All There Is?" as easily as a torchy cover of "Je Suis Malade." His San Francisco song list will range from classics by Kurt Weill and Jacques Brel to offerings by Lou Reed and the late director Rainer

CABARET

TIM FISCHER performs at 8 p.m. Friday at Herbst Theatre, 401 Van Ness Ave. Tickets $20-$50. Call (415) 392-4400. Fischer also performs March 3-7 at Josie's Cabaret, 3583 16th St. Tickets $12-$15. Call (415) 861-7933.

Like the notoriously dissipated Fassbinder, Fischer believes that firsthand experience is the path to emotional and artistic veracity. "Fassbinder went to a lot of extremes. That was important to him. You have to do something if you're going to sing about it."

Fischer began his own walk on the wild side as a teenager in the sleepy town of Delmenhorst. His parents were hippies, a lifestyle their iconoclastic son found "boring." By the time he was 12, Fischer had decided to be a chansonnier. By 15, he was performing in local clubs.

"Maybe it was a type of exhibitionism," he says of his early start. "Anyway, I was lucky because I always wanted to sing – and I actually *could* sing."

At 17, he moved to Hamburg and began his music career in a grand old theater in the city's red-light district. He moved on to Berlin in 1992.

"Hamburg was too clean for me," he says. "But I liked Berlin. It was an old and very disturbed city."

At times Fischer was adversely affected by that disturbed sensibility, culminating in a brief but heavy drug phase and months spent living

His unpredictable repertoire, smoky tenor and vampy stage presence – which found him looking like a schoolboy one night and Marlene Dietrich the next – soon generated a cross-gender, cross-generational following among Berlin's nightclubbers.

Fischer hopes for the same in San Francisco. "I am always billed as androgynous, and I probably am that. But really I think I am between the sexes," he says with a silky smile.

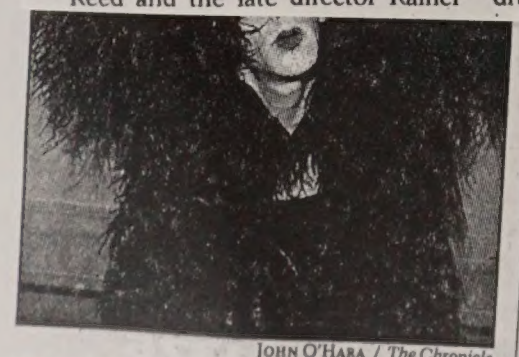
"I transport feelings, and that is the most important thing. These are love songs for everyone. Some of them are very sad."

His eyes sparkle. "I have a lot of fun with sadness."

"I was always in love with

JOHN O'HARA / The Chronicle

Caberet singer Tim Fischer wore a feathery jacket to talk about his performance style.



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